THE ISSUES—AS SEEN BY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

By HADLEY CANTRIL

THOMAS DEWEY has stated the issues as he sees them—from "the Roosevelt Depression" to "lack of integrity." Franklin Roosevelt has stated the issues as he sees them—from "isolationism" to "inexperience." Columnists, Congressmen, and Fala have stated the issues—everyone but the millions who will pick the winner.

In this article, for the first time, the issues are stated by those who have no voice but the vote, and stated through the skilled interpretation of Hadley Cantril, Director of Princeton's Office of Public Opinion Research.

THE election of 1944 will concern more people in more nations than any election of American history. From Tokio to Johannesburg, from Moscow to Buenos Aires men and women will watch us closely on November 7th and try to figure out the significance of our voting. Seldom has it been so essential for responsible persons everywhere to have a sound and accurate basis upon which to judge the issues of the coming election as they are seen by the American people themselves.

What is the picture? If Roosevelt is re-elected, what will it mean as an index of majority thinking? And if Dewey is elected, what will it imply in terms of dissatisfaction with the President's policies and management? Thanks to the polling mechanism, we are now able to filter out the issues of an election and discover something about why people vote the way they do.

THE BIG ISSUE

The first fact to get straight is that political behavior in this country is well solidified and that only a relatively small proportion of votes is affected by campaign arguments or the issues that bubble up from the ferment of events. Whether we are Republicans or Democrats, we are likely to forget this and to hoodwink ourselves with our own intellectualism. The evidence indicates that by and large about 80 per cent of voters actually vote the way they do just because "they are Republicans" or "they are Democrats."[1]

[1] See, for example, Hadley Cantril and John Harding, "The 1942 Elections: A Case Study in Political Psychology," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1943, 7, 222-241. For further discussion of this point see Dr. Paul Lazarsfeld's analysis in the present issue, pp. 317-330.

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Insofar as issues are important, the outcome of the election will depend on what point the majority of people think we have reached on the continuum that runs from war to peace. This continuum is not a simple dichotomous affair with "war" on one side and "peace" on the other. It runs from the one extreme of the prosecution of vigorous war against both Germany and Japan, to the other extreme of both wars considered as over, the peace settlement nicely wrapped up. Between these extremes are, of course, other likely contingencies: the Western war over and the Pacific war growing in intensity, the settlement of accounts with Germany, the creation of an international organization to maintain world peace, the beginning of demobilization and reconversion on a large scale. Above all, between the current spotlight on war and the beckoning spotlight on peace, will be the transitional spotlight focussed on the making of the peace itself.

How do Roosevelt and Dewey look to the American people when these three different spotlights are turned on them?

There can be no doubt that an overwhelming majority of voters believe the President and the present administration can get on better with the job of finishing the war quickly than Dewey or the Republicans can. Roosevelt's advantage here is nearly two to one. And the Democratic party—as contrasted to the President himself—enjoys the same wide margin (Chart 1).[2] Apparently people feel strongly that the civilian administrators who have helped create and run our war machine have run it well and—with things going as favorably for us as they are—it would not make sense to shift leadership. The most striking evidence of this feeling is that about five per cent more of those people with close relatives in the armed services say they intend to vote for Roosevelt than do those without close relatives in the Armed Forces. And 81 per cent of the citizens, when directly questioned, say that the President has done a good job in handling our military affairs and the accompanying diplomatic problems (Chart 2).

After the President wrote the Chairman of the Democratic party accepting the nomination and using the Commander-in-Chief theme, some Republican leaders immediately began to raise objections to

[2] The symbols after questions on the charts refer to nation-wide public opinion surveys made by various organizations. *AIPO* represents the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup poll); *Fortune* represents the Fortune poll conducted by Elmo Roper; *NORC* is the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Denver; *OPOR* is the Office of Public Opinion Research, Princeton University.

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Chart 1.

PEOPLE THINK ROOSEVELT AND THE DEMOCRATS WILL FINISH THE WAR FASTEST

"Which party do you think is more likely to bring the war to a successful end at the earliest time -- the Democratic or the Republican?" (AIPO June 1944)

"In your opinion, which man is more likely to get the war over in the shortest time -- Dewey or Roosevelt?" (AIPO Aug. 1944)

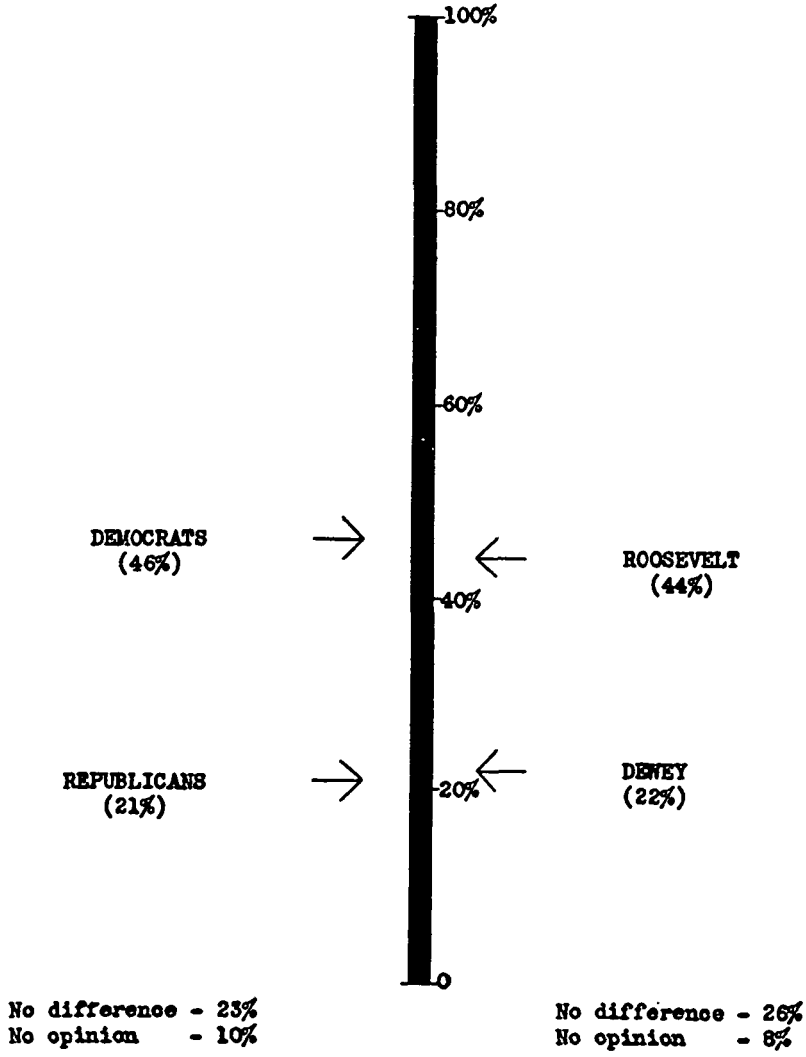

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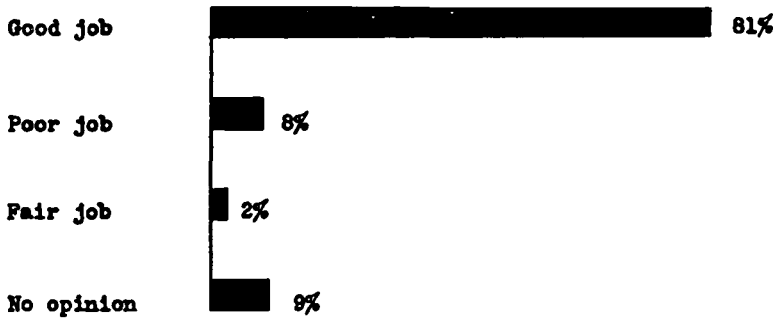
Chart 2.

THE PUBLIC APPROVES THE WAY ROOSEVELT HAS HANDLED THE WAR AND OUR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"Do you think President Roosevelt has done a good job in his handling of our military and foreign affairs abroad?" (OPOR March 1944)



Roosevelt's identification of himself with his war title. They soon discovered, however, that they had better shift their attack to some other line. For most people (including many Republicans) do think of the President as Commander-in-Chief—and as a good one. Criticism of him in this rôle simply does not take.

When people think of the candidates as peace makers and peace planners, Roosevelt again comes out far ahead (Chart 3). This is, of course, due to a majority feeling that the President's experience gives him—and therefore the nation he represents—a more realistic appraisal of the complex issues involved and a better chance of dealing successfully with the points of view and the temperaments of leaders of the other great powers.

Obviously this experience could be considered a liability if people felt it would be used as an instrument to carry out some basic orientation of which they disapproved. But by and large, the President's foreign policies meet with overwhelming approval. Most people think he and other responsible government authorities have done well in protecting American interests in the serious game of international diplomacy (Chart 4). And so the President's experience becomes a distinct asset.

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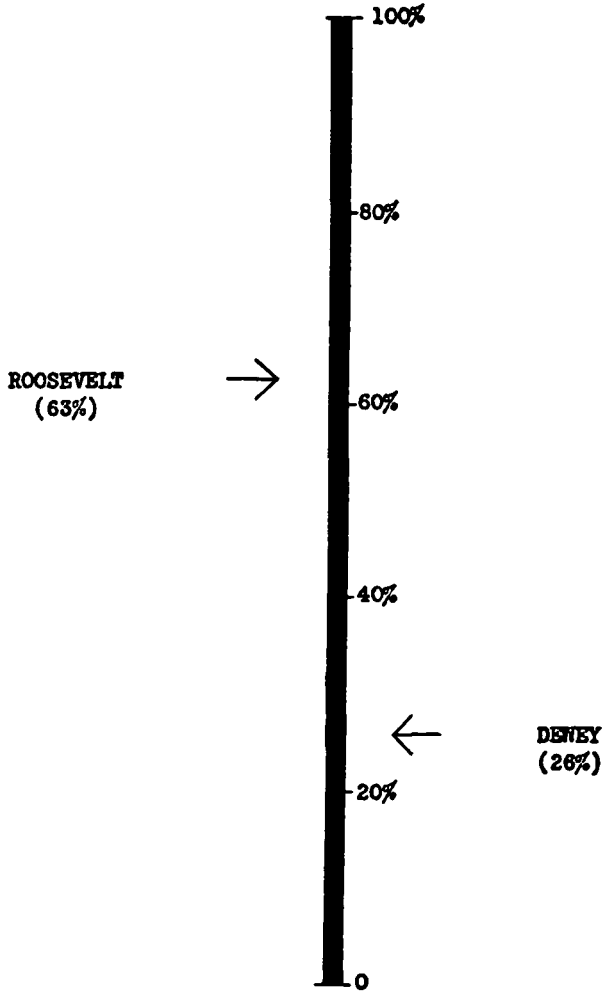
Chart 3.

THE BEST MAN FOR THE PEACE CONFERENCE --

"After the war, which man would you rather have represent the United States at the peace conference -- Roosevelt or Dewey?" (OPOR Aug. 1944)



(Either or No opinion - 11%)

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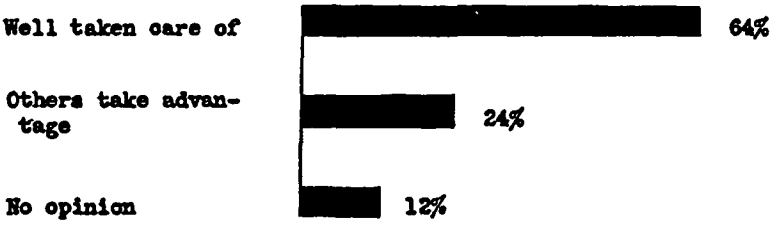
Chart 4.

MOST PEOPLE THINK THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE PROTECTED OUR INTERESTS ABROAD

"Do you think that this country's interests abroad are being well taken care of by the President and other government officials, or do you think other countries are taking advantage of us?" (OPOR June 1944)



Because the whole field of international affairs involves intricate and relatively distant problems which the average man has difficulty in relating to his own self-interest, votes for Roosevelt simply on the score of his superior ability to handle such problems are most likely to come from the better educated, upper income groups. It is just these groups, of course, which are traditionally among the most Republican. But it still seems likely from various bits of evidence that perhaps four or five per cent of those who fall in the upper educational and income brackets and who might otherwise vote Republican will in November shift to Roosevelt on the issue of international policy.

DEWEY'S CHANCE

If such an overwhelming majority of people think Roosevelt will get the war over faster and also think he would handle more proficiently the working out of a peace, how, then, does Dewey have even a chance of winning?

In addition of the vitally important considerations of party tradition and the actual turn-out on election day, the reasons (*so far as issues*

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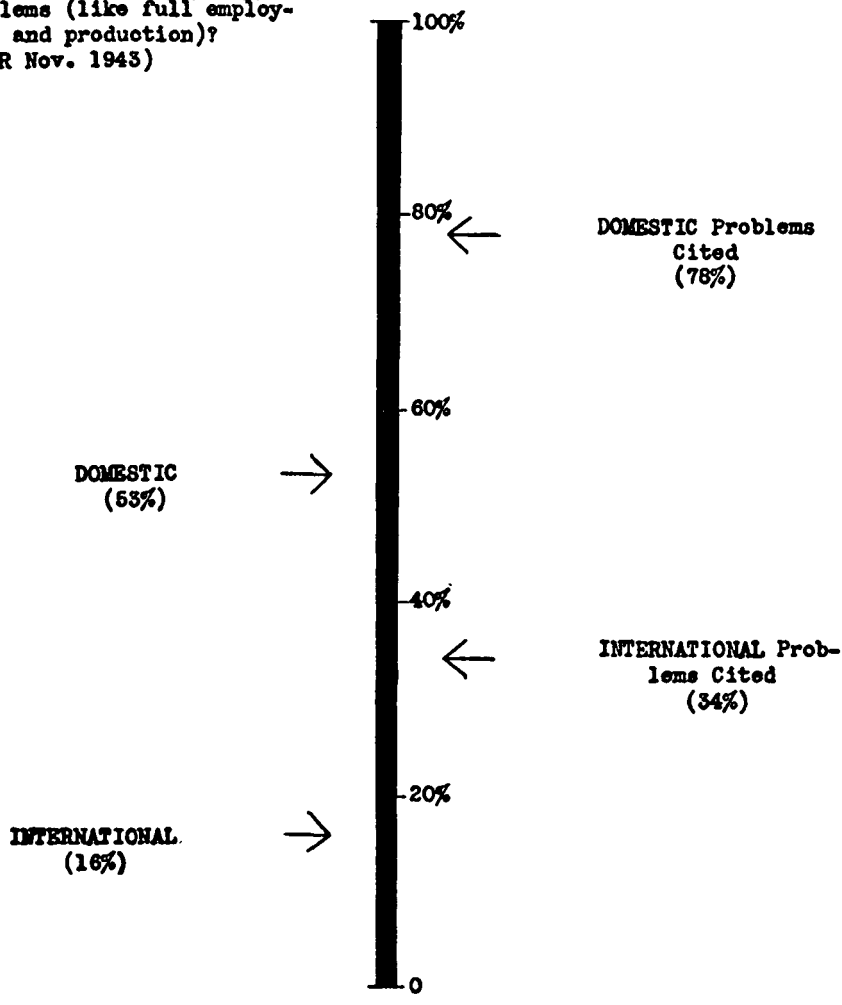
Chart 5.

COMPARISON OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Right now lots of people are interested in post-war problems. Which interests you more -- International problems (like a new league of nations and an international police force) OR domestic problems (like full employment and production)? (OPOR Nov. 1943)

What do you think will be the greatest task the president elected this year will have to face during his four years in office? (AIPO Aug. 1944)



(Both - 26%; No opinion - 5%

(Adds to more than 100% since some people mentioned more than one problem.)

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are concerned) are: (1) people may think by November 7th that the war is already in the bag, and (2) for most people, international affairs are not nearly as important as domestic affairs—the immediate day-to-day, bread-and-butter problems of jobs, wages, and personal security. Domestic problems are rated more important than international by about three voters out of four (Chart 5). And when people look at the candidates from the point of view of a world finally at peace, the President's margin dwindles to almost nothing while the margin of the Democratic party as such drops below that of the Republicans (Charts 6 and 7).

Furthermore, when the reasons people give for voting *for* Dewey or for voting *against* Roosevelt are analyzed, it is clear that the most favorable characteristic associated with Dewey is his ability to run things well here at home; the source of most criticism of Roosevelt is his inability to run things here at home efficiently (Chart 8). Dewey and his strategists have been well aware of this. Deliberately Dewey has not emphasized the election date of November 7th, 1944 but the inauguration date of January 20, 1944—to give the war and the peace more time to settle themselves. He has also tried to turn public attention to the domestic problems of the four years ahead, just as the President has tried to turn public attention to the more immediate jobs of finishing the war, making the peace, and getting reconversion and demobilization under way.

There is little need to digress here on the reasons for the apparent Republican margin when people think of domestic management. Two points, however, are noteworthy. First, the present administration is still not dissociated from WPA policies. While a majority of American voters are not opposed to government guarantees against a rainy day, they much prefer to think of themselves as part of a prosperous economy —as people with an equity in a going concern, people who are themselves taking a risk in an economy regulated only enough to keep that risk to a minimum. Second, both skilled and unskilled labor now feel less dependent on the New Deal than they have at any time during the past 12 years. The Administration will not get votes from labor because of the boom condition brought about by the war. And the Administration probably stands to lose labor votes if there are many significant cut-backs on war contracts before election day.

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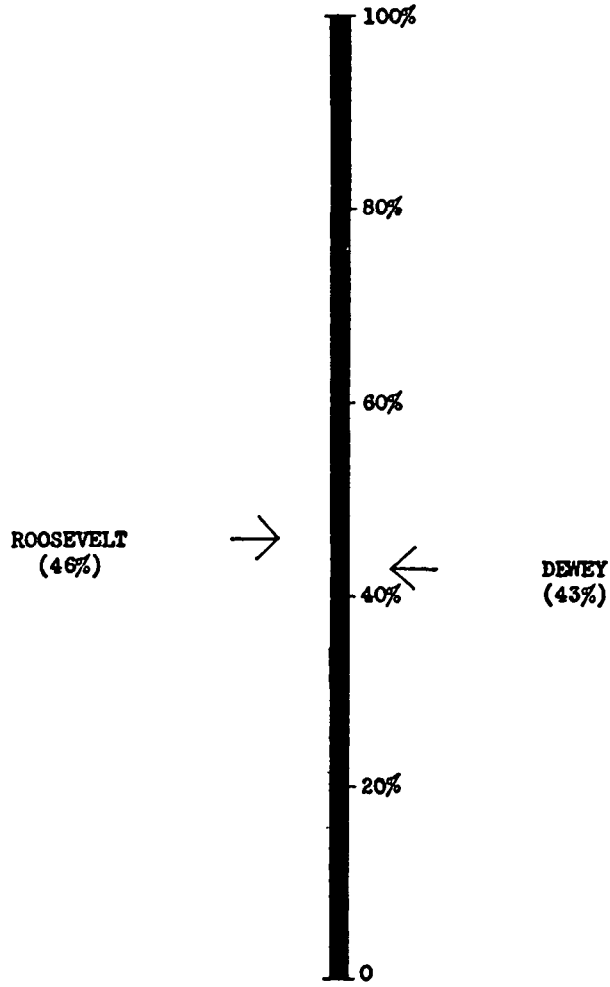
Chart 6.

THE BEST MAN TO RUN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS --

"After the war, which man do you think would do the best job of running our affairs here in this country -- Roosevelt or Dewey?" (OPOR Aug. 1944)



(Either or No opinion - 11%)

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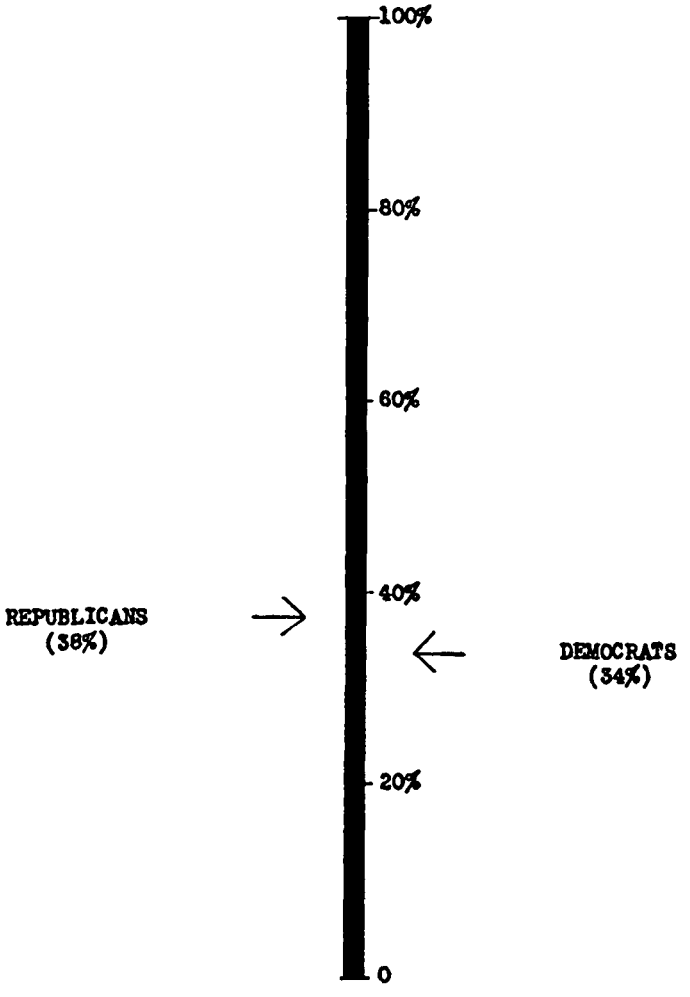
Chart 7.

THE BEST PARTY FOR POST-WAR PROSPERITY --

"After the war, which party do you think will bring the greatest prosperity and the greatest number of jobs -- the Democratic or the Republican?" (AIPO June 1944)



(No difference - 17%; No opinion - 11%)

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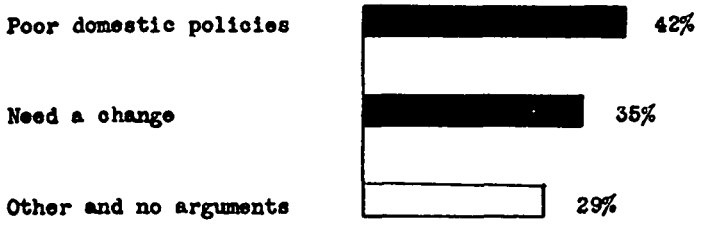
Chart 8.

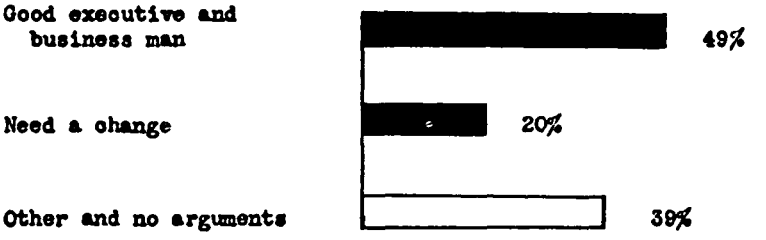
MAIN REASONS PEOPLE GIVE FOR VOTING AGAINST ROOSEVELT

"What would you say are the strongest arguments for voting AGAINST Roosevelt for the next four years?" (AIPO June 1944)



MAIN REASONS PEOPLE GIVE FOR VOTING FOR DEWEY

"What would you say are the strongest arguments for voting FOR Dewey for President?" (AIPO June 1944)



(Note: Add to more than 100% since some people gave more than one reason.)

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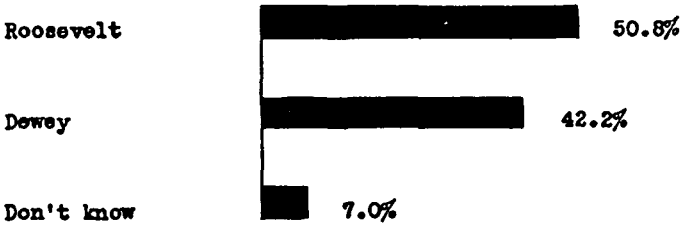
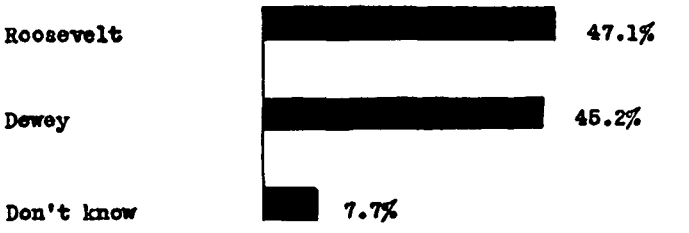
Chart 9.

HOW THE COURSE OF THE WAR AFFECTS VOTING INTENTION

"If both the war in Europe and the war in the Pacific are still going on at the time of the next Presidential election . . . . which would you probably vote for?" (FOR July 1944)



"If the war in Europe is over but the war in the Pacific is still going on . . . . ." (FOR July 1944)



"If the war is over in both places, but the peace terms are not fully worked out . . . . ." (FOR July 1944)

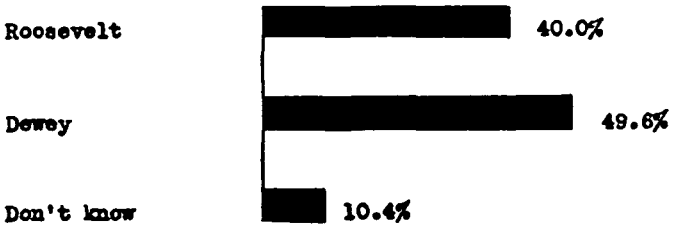


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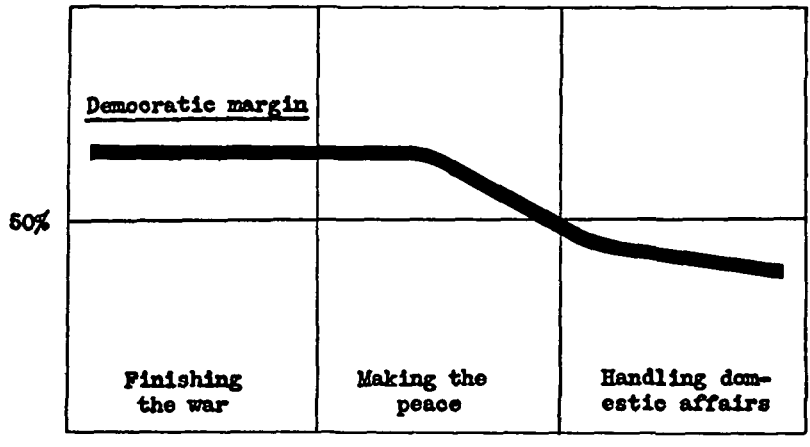
Chart 10.

THE ISSUE ON ELECTION DAY WILL BE WHICH OF THESE JOBS THE PEOPLE THINK DEMANDS MOST ATTENTION



HOW TO INTERPRET THE ELECTION

Should the Republicans win in November and should they win partially on the strength of issues and not entirely because of a factor such as low turn-out, it could only mean this: a majority of the relatively independent voters believe that the war and the peace settlements are well enough along to be trusted to less experienced hands. It could only mean that a large body of citizens believes that the *nature* of the job has changed and that Dewey will be a better man for the new job.

Most Americans think Roosevelt is doing a good job as President. Most of them still have an affection for him. Since 1932, Roosevelt has been the majority choice to lead them through one crisis after another. If the majority still feels a sense of crisis on election day, the chances are high that they will return to office the man who got them out of the depression and led them successfully through World War II (Charts 9 and 10). The dilemma of many voters will be like the dilemma of a man who wonders if he should dig up the old lawn around the house and put in a new one, or if he should work another season trying to get rid of the weeds in the neighboring lot.

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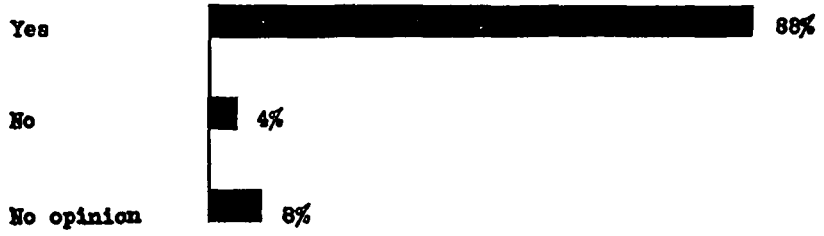
Chart 11.

REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS AGREE THAT OUR FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD NOT BE A CAMPAIGN ISSUE --

"Do you think that the Republicans and Democrats should work together in shaping our foreign policy and not make it an issue in the coming election campaign?" (AIPO April 1944)



One thing is especially crucial for our Allies (and our enemies) to get straight when they watch our election returns: on November 7th the overwhelming majority of the American people—Republicans and Democrats—will *not* be voting on our present foreign policy. Secretary Hull and many Congressmen of both parties have tried hard to keep foreign policy out of politics. The American people agree wholeheartedly with this desire (Chart 11). And an effective majority of both Republican and Democratic voters believe, for example, that we should participate in some form of international organization and that there should be some police arrangement to enforce the rules (Chart 12).

To be sure, there have been political overtones and campaign discussions concerning some of the details of peace settlements and the nature of the organization to keep the peace. Such "details," however, are not taken seriously by the great bulk of voters who believe the technicalities should be settled by the leaders and their experts. What are leaders and experts for? Should Roosevelt be defeated, it will in no sense mean that the American people want any change in the government's basic foreign policy.

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Chart 12.

POLITICAL DIFFERENCES ARE NEGLIGIBLE CONCERNING THE DESIRABILITY OF JOINING AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION AND ESTABLISHING AN INTERNATIONAL POLICE FORCE

"If a union of nations is formed after the war, do you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea for the United States to join it?" (NORC Feb. 1944)

"Should the countries fighting the Axis set up an international police force after the war is over to try to keep peace throughout the world?" (OPOR Oct. 1943)

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SOME ISSUES NOT IMPORTANT

Because of the human tendency of those who follow a party line to justify their vote with reasons, it is worth noting here several "issues" that are being called important, votewise, because various partisan groups one way or the other would like to think they are important. I am not arguing that these issues are entirely irrelevant and that no voter will be affected by them. But the evidence is that none of them is an issue which will shift an *effective percentage* of votes.

1. *Complaints and dissatisfaction about rationing, confusion of manpower or draft regulations.* To be sure, there have been complaints and criticisms. But by and large most people have taken rationing in their stride, think they have not been asked to do enough for the war. Most people think the draft has been fairly handled. Manpower confusion will influence only isolated votes.

2. *The failure of Roosevelt and the Democratic party to re-nominate Wallace.* Few people who classify themselves as liberals will vote for Dewey rather than Roosevelt just because Wallace was dropped. The emphasis of both liberals and conservatives is on "practical" men.

3. *The stronger pro-Negro plank in the Republican platform.* The great majority of northern Negroes still seem to be Democratic. Negro leaders also remember previous Republican platform pledges and know that their problems are too deeply rooted to be solved by pledges alone.

4. *The President's health and age.* As the Gallup Poll has pointed out, what you think about this depends mainly on whether you are already a Democrat or a Republican.

5. *The Political Action Committee.* A majority of people do not approve of the P.A.C. But apparently the P.A.C. was discounted early in public thinking about Presidential candidates. It's negative effect will be to re-emphasize an already existing anti-organized-labor attitude which had generally aligned itself politically.

6. *Bureaucracy and the decentralization of government.* These issues seem somewhat irrelevant to people at the present time. The mechanisms of government are seldom exciting to Americans except in periods of obvious abuse or inefficiency, when large groups of people are directly affected.

7. *Government spending and the public debt.* Again, this is a problem of government mechanics, which will not effectively concern most people unless it reaches critical proportions. And a majority does not

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think the Republicans could do any better job than the Democrats in balancing the budget.

ISSUES AND PARTY LOYALTY

If the issues of the campaign are to be seen in their proper perspective, it must be emphasized once more that issues, *per se*, account for only a small fraction of the total vote cast. At least nearly three-fourths of the voters seem to vote year after year for the party they call their own.

This fall the Democrats face a political situation with unusual difficulties for them. The already cohesive Republican party will be further unified by its continued opposition to a "man," always a more real and understandable symbol than opposition to a "party" or an "issue." The Democratic workers have the job of getting out the votes of politically less alert groups of people, of migratory workers, and of young soldiers puzzled by complex voting regulations. But, still, the major issue of this campaign—what people think will be the nature of the job that most urgently needs doing—will in all probability be the decisive factor.

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